

Small Group Study Guide

The Gift of Prophecy

1 Corinthians 14

Introduction: In this study, we continue our look at 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul addresses the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy. Last week we looked at the gift of speaking in tongues; this week we look at prophecy. Paul's main point in chapter 14 is that prophecy is preferable over tongues when the church gathers for corporate worship since understandable speech is what benefits others. Therefore, he encourages the Corinthians to desire the gift of prophecy. Steve mentioned on Sunday that though the gift of prophecy has not really been a part of our congregational experience at Faith EFC, we need to let Scripture be our authority, not our experience. So, may we approach this study of prophecy with eagerness to learn and allow our present experience to be challenged if need be.

Steve said:

I've run into three main views of prophecy. The first view is that the gift of prophecy is basically what we call preaching today; they would say that prophecy is expounding Scripture and applying it to the lives of hearers. . .The second view of prophecy is that prophets are people who see things in black and white and make strong, bold statements about what's right and wrong. In this view, the gift of prophecy is basically "telling it like it is" without much thought of whether it sounds nice or not. My guess is that this view of prophecy is a rough approximation of how the Old Testament prophets operated; they didn't beat around the bush in declaring what's right and wrong. . .The third view is the one that I hold (and the view that I believe is supported by Scripture). In this view, a word of prophecy is ***a message from God to a person(s) or situation***. I'm using the general term "message" to denote a wide variety of content. Sometimes a word of prophecy was a prediction of a future event. . . More often a prophecy was a word of "encouragement or edification or consolation." The gift of prophecy suggests that there may be times when God wants to communicate a timely message to His people.

1. Which of these views are the closest to how you have thought about the gift of prophecy?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

2. What does Paul teach about the gift of prophecy? What function does it serve?
3. Why were the Corinthians to desire the gift of prophecy above the gift of speaking in tongues?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:20-25

4. What do these verses add to Paul's overall point that prophecy is preferable over tongues when the church gathers for corporate worship?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-33; 37-40

5. What do these verses add to Paul's teaching on how the church should function when it gathers for worship?
6. What insight do these verses give concerning the benefit of the gift of prophecy?
7. What in these verses suggests that the type of prophecy Paul is talking about is very different from Old Testament prophecy?

Steve said:

Toward a wise, biblical use of the gift of prophecy: If you're moving "toward" a destination, it means that you haven't arrived there yet. As I mentioned earlier, prophecy has not been part of our congregational experience. Most of us are much more familiar with the abuses than with the benefits of the gift of prophecy. But – like tongues – Paul clearly describes it as a good gift from God. So, it seems to me that a local church should move toward a wise, biblical use of the gift of prophecy. It's not the type of thing you can or should force, but it does seem to me that a church can either block out and effectively eliminate a gift such as prophecy or it can put itself in a position to experience the gift of prophecy as God leads. It seems to me that Paul is advocating the latter position. I believe that Paul gives ample instruction on how the gift of prophecy should be practiced to safeguard against the abuses that are commonly associated with this gift.

8. How might the proper use of prophecy benefit our church?
9. What concerns would you have if the gift of prophecy were to be used in our church in a more visible way?
10. What are the safeguards that prevent an abuse of this gift?

Steve said:

For a church to move toward a wise, biblical use of the gift of prophecy, the first issue is that of ***desire*** . . . it makes sense that some within a local church would desire the gift of prophecy. It would be up to God to give that gift according to His will. The motivation for such a gift isn't power or prestige; it's a humble desire for the body of Christ to receive everything God might want to communicate.

The second issue I'll mention is ***context***. If a local church were moving toward a wise, biblical use of the gift of prophecy, it seems to me that the place to begin is NOT on a Sunday morning with a room full of people, many of whom don't know each other. . . It seems preferable for such gifts to surface in the context of a smaller group of believers who know each other well. . . Over time the gift of prophecy might be confirmed and then used in a larger context.

The third issue is ***authority***. . . A person with the gift of prophecy . . . needs to submit to the authority of the Word. Any word of prophecy should be measured against Scripture and rejected if it is found to be inconsistent or contrary to Scripture.

11. What do you think of Steve's suggestions of moving towards a wise, biblical use of the gift of prophecy?